

Vision 21 Implementation Committee

Minutes, January 8, 2004

(approved March 18, 2004)

Present: Jenny Fallon, Joe Greene, Matt Hausmann, Tim Higgins, Bill Hofmann, Meg O'Brien, Jennifer Page, Paul Solomon, Barry Winston

Absent: Victoria Haase, Sara Oaklander

1. Administrivia

1.1 The meeting, held in the Staff Room of the Library, was called to order at 7:07 p.m.

1.2 The minutes of December 18, 2003 were approved.

2. Looking Ahead

2.1 Members were invited to attend the BEDPG meeting planned for Jan. 14 at 7:00, Room 1 of the Town Hall, to hear the results of the BEDPG survey. Paul, Jenny, Joe, Tim, and Jennifer may be able to attend.

2.2 Jennifer urged members to attend the various public meeting which are being held by town committees to seek public input. We should support committees as they begin to value and seek opinion from the public. Members were invited to attend one of the upcoming Library "visioning" meetings. Meg asked again that members sign up to go to one of the Cable Communication Planning Workshops.

2.3 The VIC contribution to the Annual Report of the town is due Jan. 26th. Jennifer asked for input about what should be included. Meg, Sarah, Jenny, and Joe will draft paragraphs for the various initiatives they have been involved with. In addition, the Waverley Fire Station planning process, the Chamber of Commerce Award, work on the zoning by-law, and the report on issues affecting business and economic development were mentioned.

2.4 Jennifer announced a meeting Jan. 11 at 4:00 at her house to assemble the welcoming booklets with the new inserts.

3. Report from the Senior Planner: MBTA plans for Waverley

Tim was asked to give a summary of his report to the Selectmen, especially describing the potential MBTA "air rights" project. This is an exciting proposed project which is part of Gov. Romney's smart growth initiative. Four communities including Belmont are working with the MBTA to investigate development projects around existing commuter rail stations. Such a project in Waverley Square would involve a mixed use development (residential, commercial, and parking) using a deck over the MBTA rail line and the town owned parcel where the parking lot is currently. Because of their familiarity with the area through the Trapelo Road Corridor Study, the Cecil Group has been retained to do the feasibility study for the project to determine what a cost effective development might look like. The proposed buildings would be owned by private developers and would be added to the town's tax rolls. The MBTA is contributing \$12,000 to defray the cost of the study. At the Jan. 26 meeting of the Board of Selectmen, at 7:00, the Board will hear the report and begin to understand what such a project might entail. The projects are proposed to make use of the rail service, not attract more cars. Information about the project as it develops will be on the web site. There was some discussion about the benefit of having parking available for Belmont residents who would like to use the commuter rail.

4. Helping Belmont become a more environmentally responsible community.

4.1 Cape Cod model: Members were asked for responses to articles describing environmental initiatives on Cape Cod. It was felt that while the Cape Cod model provides an attractive framework, it may be too comprehensive in scope to be practical for us. The umbrella of “sustainability” is appealing as a way of defining the initiative which will not put people off. The goal of making “sustainability” considerations part of the public decision making process and broadening the view of these issues by looking at economic, environmental and social factors and interactions were thought to be useful and good. These articles are also attractive models for making these issues public. Communication will be very important in any “sustainability” initiatives. Members liked the “What Can You Do?” parts of the articles, which suggest concrete options for individual action.

4.2 Where should we start in Belmont? How should we proceed to help the town take steps toward becoming more environmentally responsible? There was discussion about forming a leadership group and/or holding a forum. It was felt that there are already a large number of forums seeking public input on various initiatives right now. It was suggested that we identify a group of people whom we know to be interested in sustainability issues and call them together to try to start some movement in this area. There was discussion about how formal we should be in providing a framework and direction for such a group. There was discussion about how to energize volunteer leadership when people are so busy. It was suggested that we should pick a specific topic to start with that is viewed as a problem to be worked on and solved, to make the group’s work more urgent and concrete. Several ideas for such topics were mentioned, including: How can we clean up Clay Pit Pond? How can we work with the Electric Light Department to purchase more renewable energy, or to publicize individual incentives for conservation better? How can we work with the Water Department on issues of conservation? One of the difficulties we face in deciding where to start is that our work to identify environmental action in Belmont has focused so far on what is being done rather than what is not being done.

4.3 An environmental fair was suggested as a possible first event. It would involve people who are already activists and get more people’s attention. We could involve the schools and school environmental groups. We would be seeking to broaden the base of people involved and generate some excitement in the community about sustainability issues. There was a consensus that we should pursue the idea of a fair. If we hold it at the High School, we might use Clay Pit Pond as one possible focus. Jenny will contact the School Department to begin to explore the idea. Jennifer will contact MCAN for information about other fairs that might be helpful models. Other members were asked to make lists of groups or committees that should be contacted to be involved and to send their lists to Jennifer and Jenny.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Jenny Fallon, Secretary Pro-Tem